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To: Michigan House Regulatory Reform Committee Members

I am writing in regard to current legislation that is intended to deregulate the profession of forestry (SB 481; 484, HB 4379; 4380). I urge you to vote NO on this legislation. These bills will have a definite negative effect on our private forestlands, harm citizens who own those lands, and ultimately harm forest industry in Michigan.

Michigan forest owners are often not professional foresters, and need a source of information that helps them select a professional forester to assist them in assessing their land and making informed decisions regarding management. With Registration, if a forester presents themselves to a citizen as a professional and registered forester, it means that the citizen can expect that this forester possesses a minimum of a bachelor's degree in forestry, on-the-ground experience as a professional, and has references. Our citizens deserve that service from the State.

I spent 7 years as the Forest Stewardship Coordinator for the Michigan DNR before taking an early retirement in 2011. While employed at the DNR, many private citizens called for help in finding a reliable forester to help them make decisions about their forest land. Many asked about the Registered Forester designation.

I know of two examples of landowners who were devastated by signing a contract with people who purported themselves to be foresters and took advantage of them. These pseudo-foresters would knock on their door and offer them money to cut their forestland. In these cases, the landowner agreed and signed a contract the 'buyer' offered, only to find out later that their woods were clearcut, even though this is not what they wanted, and they were paid far less than market value for their timber. Because they signed a contract, there was no legal recourse. For some owners, the woods they used as a source of enjoyment and investment were now ruined, as they would not have merchantable trees for 30 to 50 years hence. They considered selling the land.

The passing of these bills sends a bad message at a time when Michigan's Legislature is encouraging active forest management on private forestlands. The message these bills send to the public is that it is not necessary to utilize qualified professional foresters to manage their valuable resource.

The Michigan Registered Forester Regulation includes functions that a "Registered Forester" can and does perform. Without its inclusion in the Occupational Code, Michigan Citizens will be at the mercy of anyone who chooses to call themselves a forester. This longstanding program has legal Standing in Michigan, and is being successfully housed and administered through the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA).